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SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

Training and Development of Senior Executives

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The Honorable Gerry Sikorski
Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil Service
Committee on Post Office and Civil
Service
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report, which your predecessor Chairwoman Schroeder requested, presents information on the extent to which career members of the Senior Executive Service participated in executive training and development activities and their perceptions of the usefulness of those experiences. The information covers their experiences in preparing for, and since appointment to, the Senior Executive Service. It also presents information on how the Office of Personnel Management fulfills its leadership role for executive training and development.

As agreed with the Subcommittee, we are sending a copy of this report to Representative Schroeder, and unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Director, Office of Personnel Management; the President, Senior Executive Association; and other parties.

Other major contributors to this report are listed in appendix VI. Please contact me at 275-5074 if you or your staff have any questions concerning the report.

Sincerely yours,

for Steven J. Wozny

Bernard L. Ungar
Director, Federal Human Resource
Management Issues

Executive Summary

Purpose

As the government's general managers, the roughly 6,000 career members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) are responsible for a broad range of essential government activities, such as acquiring weapon systems to safeguard the country and providing accurate and timely benefits to the elderly. The 1978 law creating the SES emphasized the importance of training and developing these executives by requiring the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to direct the (1) systematic training and development of SES candidates and (2) continuing training and development of SES members.

Because sufficient information was unavailable, the House Subcommittee on Civil Service asked GAO to survey career SES members of different-sized agencies to obtain their views on the extent and usefulness of their training and development experiences. The Subcommittee also wanted to know how OPM fulfills its leadership responsibilities for executive training and development.

Background

OPM has delegated to agencies responsibility for directing, planning, and operating executive training and development programs. OPM continues to be responsible for providing agencies central leadership, establishing criteria and overseeing adherence to them, and assisting agencies in implementing programs.

The National Commission on the Public Service, a private organization also known as the Volcker Commission, recently examined, through a task force, the education and training of professional personnel in federal service. In 1989, the Commission made several recommendations to the President and Congress to improve the training and education of federal executives and managers. (See pp. 12 and 21.)

GAO sent questionnaires to a statistically valid sample of SES members, and the responses received are projectable to about 77 percent of the SES membership as of June 30, 1987. The executives provided information through 1987 on the extent and usefulness of their executive training (such as formal classroom training and seminars) and development (such as rotational job assignments and task forces). (See pp. 10 and 44.)

Results in Brief

Survey results showed that 87 percent of the executives had participated in at least one training or development activity before SES appointment, and 77 percent had done so after appointment. Most perceived

their experiences as moderately to very useful in helping them carry out their SES duties.

Participation, however, was uneven. About 13 percent of the executives appointed since 1982 said they had no formal training or development experiences to prepare them to become executives. The percentages in 1986 and 1987 were 27 and 15 percent. Nearly one-fourth of the executives reported no training or development experiences since becoming executives, with half of these reporting none in 5 years. Executives from small agencies (50 or fewer executives) had lower rates of participation than their counterparts in larger agencies.

A factor contributing to this unevenness is the lack of criteria for the amount and content of executive training and development. Agencies are responsible for devising their own criteria, except for little-used candidate development programs, which must follow OPM requirements. A Volcker Commission task force recommended that federal executives and other professional employees receive training on a regular basis. GAO endorses this concept.

OPM has begun a reexamination with the aim of providing more leadership for executive development governmentwide. GAO believes the reexamination is appropriate and recommends a number of issues OPM should address.

GAO's Analysis

Extent and Usefulness of Training and Development

Overall, about 13 percent of the executives appointed since fiscal year 1982 said that in the 5 years before appointment they had not participated in any training or development activity that was designed to prepare them to become executives. About 27 percent of the appointees in 1986 and 15 percent in 1987 said this while the percentage each year from 1982 to 1985 was less. (See pp. 14 and 15.)

The percentage of executives without training or development increased after SES appointment. About 23 percent of all executives reported receiving no training or development since their appointment date or October 1981, whichever was later. More than half of these executives were appointed in 1982 or before and thus had not participated in a

formal training or development activity in at least 5 years. (See pp. 15 and 16.)

Executives cited a number of reasons for not participating. Usually, before appointment, activities were waived or precluded because of work and training experiences already obtained and because time away from the job was unavailable. The latter reason was predominate after appointment. (See pp. 18 to 20.)

Nevertheless, executives considered the training and development experiences they did receive before and after appointment to be useful in helping them do their jobs. About 80 percent considered their training to be useful overall to a moderate, great, or very great extent, while at least 75 percent felt that way about their development experiences. (See pp. 23 to 25.)

However, the mechanisms for ensuring that appropriate training and development activities are obtained—formal needs assessments, advisors to SES candidates, Executive Resources Boards—often are not working as well as intended according to survey results. Executives also perceived other, greater benefits from their training and development experiences than improving their competencies in certain areas that OPM considers essential to executive performance, such as planning, organizing, and directing programs or projects. (See pp. 27 to 32.)

Volcker Commission Task Force's Recommendation

A Volcker Commission task force recommended that OPM adopt a policy requiring regular training for all professional federal employees, suggesting at least 80 hours of continuing professional education every 2 years. Each agency is generally responsible for the content and timing of executive training and development, except for candidate development programs. OPM has set some requirements for such programs. However, only 21 percent of the executives GAO surveyed who were appointed to the SES after candidate programs began entered from them. (See pp. 21 and 22.)

Problems of Small Agencies

GAO analyzed responses by agency size, and small agencies appear to face more problems than their larger counterparts in providing executive training and development. For example, a much larger proportion of executives from small agencies did not receive pre-appointment training

and development; considered the pre-appointment training and development they did get to be of less help; and cited dollar costs as a reason for nonparticipation after appointment. (See pp. 15, 25, and 19.)

OPM Reexamining its Role

OPM recently began a reexamination of its role and responsibilities for executive training and development. An internal recommendation urged OPM to take a more active leadership role in ensuring that federal managers and executives are developed as effectively as possible. OPM plans to issue guidance on what should be expected from federal executives and the types of experiences that can assist them in meeting these expectations. OPM also plans to examine its oversight function; it has not been actively providing such oversight in the last several years. (See pp. 34 to 39.)

Recommendations

GAO recommends that the Director of OPM, as part of OPM's reassessment effort, examine the issues contained in this report, such as the need for minimal levels of executive training and development, the problems small agencies face in providing such training and development, and the specific responsibilities agencies and OPM should have in developing a strong oversight process. GAO recommends that, in addition, the reexamination address the Volcker Commission's recommendations concerning (1) defining the skills needed by today's executives, (2) providing guidance on the kinds of executive development curricula appropriate to future success, and (3) encouraging agencies, with appropriate guidance and oversight, to develop and contract for their own mission-oriented training. (See p. 42.)

Agency Comments

In written comments on a draft of this report, the OPM Director said OPM generally agrees that it needs to do a major examination of the training and development policies and programs for senior executives. The Director said OPM, as a first step, will make a broad review of the policies and issues affecting the training and development of senior executives and other government employees; and instead of "repackaging old programs," OPM will be searching for "long-term, cost-effective and innovative solutions." (See app. V.)

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Abbreviations

CDP	Candidate Development Program
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
SES	Senior Executive Service

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Senior Executive Service (SES) was created by Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act (Public Law 95-454, Oct. 13, 1978). Envisioned as a cadre of general managers capable of serving in positions across the government, Congress established the SES "to ensure that the executive management of the government...is responsive to the needs, policies and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality." SES members have the challenge and responsibility of translating the Nation's laws and administration's policies into effective service to the public.

They are responsible for programs covering a broad range of critical government activities, such as ensuring safe air travel, acquiring weapons to safeguard the country's defense, managing the cleanup of hazardous wastes, protecting the stability of financial markets, and providing accurate and timely benefits to the elderly. Consisting of over 6,000 senior officials,[1] career SES members work at the strategic juncture of politics and administration, just below the President and his top political appointees.

SES Training and Development Program Structure

The act requires the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to establish programs, or require agencies to establish programs, for the (1) systematic development of candidates for SES positions and (2) continuing development of SES members. If OPM chooses to delegate the responsibility for establishing executive training and development programs to agencies, the act requires it to (1) establish criteria for the agencies' programs, (2) assist agencies in their implementation, and (3) oversee and enforce adherence to its prescribed criteria.

In practice, OPM has delegated to agencies the responsibility for planning, implementing, and operating executive development programs under OPM prescribed criteria. For example, OPM established the Candidate Development Program (CDP) in 1979 and requires agencies to operate CDPs under OPM's criteria, guidance, and oversight. The program's purposes are to (1) identify highly competent individuals most likely to be appointed to SES and (2) prepare them through individualized training and development activities. CDPs, however, have not been a major source of SES appointments. See p. 21.

[1] The SES includes career and noncareer senior executives. A basic distinction between the two is whether the executive is a political appointee. Noncareer executives generally are political appointees; career executives are not. The latest OPM data shows 6,100 career executives in September 1988 and 670 noncareer executives. The career executive is the focus of this report.

The act also requires agencies to establish Executive Resources Boards, which are comprised of top-level agency officials selected by the agency head. The boards are responsible for designing and implementing procedures for the competitive appointment of applicants to career SES positions. They are also responsible for providing the overall direction and management of agency CDP efforts and oversight of executive training and development activities.

OPM regulations require that each SES member and candidate have an Individual Development Plan and that each plan be approved by an Executive Resources Board. SES members' plans are to be linked to performance objectives and are to focus on enhancing existing managerial competencies and correcting identified deficiencies.

According to the Federal Personnel Manual, the plans can serve as the primary tool for ensuring that executives maintain currency in appropriate areas. The manual explains that the senior executive's environment is a highly complex world of constant change where executives must be knowledgeable about such areas as technological developments, new legislation, and innovative management practices. The plans may provide for development of individual executives through such activities as rotational assignments within the agency or at other agencies, participation in federal-nonfederal employee exchange programs, attendance at seminars or conferences, or formal training at universities or other private institutions. The manual requires "regular updating" of each senior executive's development plan.

OPM regulations require each candidate to be assigned a senior advisor (mentor) from the SES. Mentors are to provide a broad, long-term perspective as well as insight about the organization's management, help candidates prepare Individual Development Plans, help arrange developmental assignments, and monitor the candidate's progress.

Management as a Profession

In the Federal Personnel Manual, OPM states that the nature of managerial competencies establishes management as a distinct "second profession" that must be prepared for with careful deliberation and analysis. The vast majority of managerial positions, according to OPM, are filled by people selected because of their technical qualifications in a specialized profession or career field. These qualifications, however, become collateral to the profession of management, according to OPM. Recognition of the need for additional preparation in management, OPM states, is the

basis for the requirement to develop members of, and candidates for, the SES.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

As agreed with the House Subcommittee on Civil Service, our objectives were to:

- survey career federal executives in different-sized agencies, soliciting their perceptions of the extent and usefulness of their training and development experiences before and after SES appointment;
- discuss the survey results with key officials from different-sized agencies and OPM; and
- examine how OPM fulfills its executive development roles and responsibilities.

We did not independently assess the adequacy or effectiveness of individual executive training and development courses and activities.

We used two mail questionnaires to obtain career SES members' perceptions of executive training and development. One questionnaire was sent to SES members entering executive ranks since fiscal year 1982, the other to those career members entering before this date. This was done to account for the "start-up" of agencies' CDPs in 1980 and 1981, and it separates those executives who ostensibly would have had the opportunity to participate in an agency CDP from those who did not. We ascertained from the newer SES members, those appointed in fiscal year 1982 and after, their perceptions of training and development experiences in preparation for SES. We asked both groups for their perceptions of executive training and development since SES appointment.

In our questionnaires, we defined "training activities" as formal experiences, such as education courses, seminars, workshops, or other formal classroom events provided by the executive's agency, by another federal agency, or by sources external to the federal government. We defined "development activities" as experiences other than formal training that further the executive's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Examples include rotational assignments, special assignments, task forces, sabbaticals, or other "additional duties" meant to enhance the executive's career and may occur either within or external to the executive's agency or the federal government.

The questionnaires were mailed in November 1987 to a random sample of 599 career federal executives out of a total of 6,180 identified by OPM

records as government employees on June 30, 1987. We received 451 responses containing sufficient data to analyze, a response rate of 75 percent.

In addition to separating the executives into the two appointment groups, we stratified the sample so we could project the results to agencies with small (1 to 50), medium (51 to 250), and large (over 250) numbers of career SES members. The size of these categories was provided by the Subcommittee.

The 451 usable responses project to 4,764 career federal executives—2,272 who entered the SES since fiscal year 1982 and 2,492 who entered before then. The following chapters present the projected results of the sample.[2]

The sample was designed so that projections could be made at the 95 percent confidence level with no more than 10 percent sampling error in each strata. However, because not all SES members in our sample responded to a questionnaire, and not all who responded answered every question, some of our projections have a sampling error that exceeds 10 percent. See appendix I for a more detailed description of our sampling plan and methodology and appendix II for the sampling errors for the projections used in this report.

Although we did not compare questionnaire responses to training records, we obtained reactions of personnel and program officials to the results of our analysis. The officials were from OPM and seven other agencies: the Commodities Futures Trading Commission, U.S. Information Agency, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Departments of the Interior, Labor, the Army, and Energy. We randomly selected six of the seven agencies, two from each agency-size category, after judgmentally reducing the candidates to those with more centralized executive development functions. We believed officials from such agencies would know more about their entire agencies than officials from agencies with decentralized functions. We judgmentally selected the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because the official we

[2]To hold down the length of this report, we have not included the detailed results of every question in the questionnaires, such as information by type of training or development. That information is available through the contact and telephone number listed on page i.

spoke with there also vice-chaired the Small Agency Council[1] and provided views from that perspective.

Altogether, either in groups or individually, we spoke with 19 officials from the 7 agencies. They included 10 personnel officials (such as directors of personnel and directors or coordinators of employee training) and 9 program or management officials (such as the Deputy Commissioner of Labor Statistics and the Deputy Associate Director for Fusion Energy). Two of the officials were among the 451 senior executives who responded to our questionnaire surveys.

At OPM headquarters, we discussed with officials the results of our analysis and how OPM fulfills its role under the act for formulating executive training and development policy, assisting agencies in such training and development, and overseeing agency programs. In addition, we reviewed pertinent documentation, such as guidance OPM provides through the Federal Personnel Manual, in ascertaining how OPM fulfills its role under the act.

Finally, we reviewed the March 1989 report Leadership For America: Rebuilding the Public Service, issued by the National Commission on the Public Service, more commonly known as the Volcker Commission after its chairman, Paul A. Volcker. Of particular interest to our review was the report from the Commission's Task Force on Education and Training.[2] It contained information on and recommendations for executive development, which underlie the Commission's report. The Commission, a private organization made up of prominent citizens, was formed in 1987 to prepare recommendations to the President and Congress on the "quiet crisis" in government.[3] According to the Commission, too many of the Nation's best senior executives are ready to leave government, and not enough of its most talented young people are willing to join.

[1]The Small Agency Council is made up of senior management officials from 70 agencies with 6,000 or fewer employees. The Council meets on a monthly basis to discuss and act on concerns of small agencies, including training and development issues.

[2]Report of the Task Force on Education and Training to the National Commission on the Public Service, Investment For Leadership: Education and Training for the Public Service (Washington, D.C. 1989).

[3]On April 27, 1989, we testified before the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service that we agree with the thrust of almost all of the Commission's recommendations. (Report of the National Commission on the Public Service, GAO/T-GGD-89-19.)

We followed generally accepted government auditing standards in doing our work, which was done mostly in Washington, D.C., between November 1987 and June 1989. We obtained written comments from the Director, OPM, on a draft of this report, and those comments are presented on pages 42 and 43 and in appendix V.

Executive Participation in Training and Development

The projected results of our questionnaires showed that about 87 percent of the executives appointed to the SES in fiscal year 1982 and later said they received some executive training or development before appointment. However, the responses also showed that 13 percent received neither, a situation that became somewhat more common in recent years, with 27 percent in 1986 and 15 percent in 1987 receiving neither.

The percentage of executives without training and development after SES appointment was nearly double in comparison to before appointment. About 23 percent of the executives reported no training or development since October 1981 or their appointment date, whichever was later.

Small agencies, those with up to 50 senior executives, seem to have more difficulty than larger agencies in providing executives training and development experiences. For example, the percentage of executives from small agencies reporting no pre-appointment experiences was more than double that of their counterparts.

The Volcker Commission said the President and Congress must ensure that federal managers receive the added training they will need to perform effectively. A Commission task force recommended regular training for all professional federal employees and suggested a minimum of 80 hours of continuous education every 2 years. We endorse this concept.

Participation in Executive Training and Development Uneven

Participation in formal training and development activities varied among career executives in several ways. It varied by agency size, with executives from small agencies more often reporting no training or development in comparison to their counterparts. It varied between training and development, with lower participation rates in development activities. And, it varied between pre- and post-appointment, with participation dropping off after appointment.

Participation in Preparing for SES

To learn about pre-appointment training and development, we asked senior executives appointed since fiscal year 1982 to identify the types of training and development activities they had that were intended to prepare them for carrying out SES duties. We asked the executives to go back 5 years from appointment to make the identification, and we listed types of training and development activities they could choose from and

add to. The list included internal, interagency, and nonfederal activities, such as managerial training provided by the executive's agency and by OPM's Federal Executive Institute.

Overall, over the 5-year period, about 87 percent of the executives had participated in at least one type of training or development experience aimed at preparing them for the SES. The remaining percentage reported no such participation.

The percentage of executives appointed in any 1 year without pre-SES training or development was somewhat larger in recent years, however. The percentage for executives appointed in 1986 and 1987 was 27 percent and 15 percent, respectively. For appointments in 1982 through 1985, the percentages ranged from 8 to 11 percent. Without regard to year, a much larger share of executives from small agencies in comparison to their counterparts reported no pre-SES training or development—31 percent compared to 15 percent from medium agencies and 9 percent from large agencies.

The above analysis considered training and development together; that is, an executive could have participated in both training and development, or in one but not the other. However, because training and development are viewed by OPM and others as important but separate ways to enhance an executive's potential performance, we also analyzed survey responses for the two areas separately. As table 2.1 shows, executives were much more likely to have had a training experience than a development experience.

Table 2.1: Executives Without Training/ Development Experiences Before SES Appointment in Fiscal Years 1982 - 1987

		Agency size		
	Overall	Small	Medium	Large
Training (percent)	18	37	20	14
Development (percent)	41	62	42	36

Participation After SES Appointment

We asked all executives to identify the types of training and development activities they participated in after appointment that were intended to help them carry out their SES duties. We asked them to consider only activities participated in since October 1, 1981, if they were appointed before then. We listed types of activities they could choose from and add to.

About 77 percent of the executives had received one or more types of training or development experiences after SES appointment. The remaining 23 percent had received none.

Some of the executives without training or development experiences were appointed in 1987 and therefore would not have had as much time as the others to obtain the experiences. However, their number made up only a small percentage (13 percent) of the no-experience category. A little more than half of the executives without experiences were appointed in 1982 or before. This means that they had not participated in a formal training or development activity in at least 5 years. From an overall perspective, this subgroup represented about 12 percent of all executives.

Agency size did not substantially affect who was getting or not getting post-appointment experiences. While small agencies had the lowest participation rates, there was only a 5-percent gap between them and the highest group.

We also analyzed the results separately between training and development. As table 2.2 shows, executives participated much more often in a training activity in comparison to a development activity.

Table 2.2: Executives Without Training/ Development Experiences After SES Appointment[a]

		Agency size		
	Overall	Small	Medium	Large
Training (percent)	28	33	29	26
Development (percent)	57	67	54	56

[a]No training or development was obtained since appointment or October 1, 1981, whichever was later.

Comparison Between Pre- and Post-Appointment Training and Development

A larger percentage of executives had not participated in training or development experiences after appointment than before appointment, and executives perceived more need for training and development after appointment.

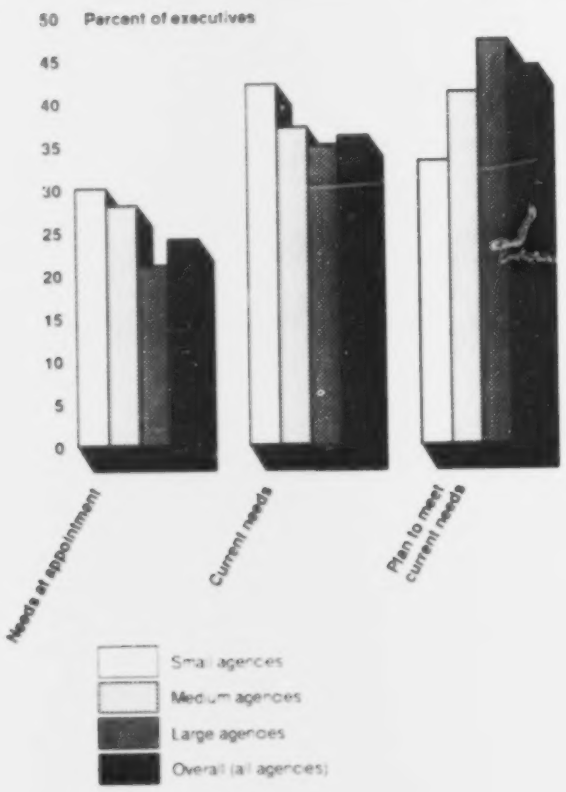
As reported earlier, 23 percent of the executives had not received any post-appointment training or development compared to 13 percent before appointment. As table 2.3 shows, nonparticipation grew considerably more in large agencies between the two periods while decreasing somewhat among small agencies. Once into the post-appointment period, however, nonparticipation was at about the same level among small, medium, and large agencies.

Table 2.3: Comparison Between Pre- and Post-appointment Percentages of Executives Without Training or Development

Period	Overall	Agency size		
		Small	Medium	Large
Pre-appointment	11	7	15	9
Post-appointment	21	20	21	23

Although overall training and development participation levels were lower after SES appointment than before, training and development needs were perceived to be higher after appointment. As figure 2.1 shows, when completing our questionnaire in late 1987 or early 1988, over one-third of all executives said they had an unmet managerial training or development need. In comparison, about one-fourth of the executives appointed since 1982 said they had such a need at the time of appointment. Among those with a current training or development need, more indicated a need in the managerial area than in the technical area.

Figure 2.1: Managerial Training and Development Needs and Plans to Meet These Needs



Executives in small agencies expressed slightly greater needs than executives in medium and large agencies both before and after appointment. Of those executives with needs in small agencies, 33 percent planned to meet those needs in the "next" 12 months. This percentage was smaller than percentages from larger agencies.

We analyzed the data to determine if those executives with training and development needs had no training and development experiences. We found they included those with past experiences as well as those without experiences.

We obtained reactions on survey findings on unmet training and development needs from officials in four agencies, and they gave the following opinions.

- Needs were higher after appointment than at the time of appointment, because the executive is often more aware of individual training and development needs associated with the particular executive position.
- More training vendors are selling training and development services today than a few years ago; as a result, executives are currently more aware of training and development opportunities than in the past, which might account for an increase in perceived needs.
- Needs were greater in small agencies, because budget and time constraints often preclude needed executive training and development.

Major Reasons for Nonparticipation in Training and Development Activities

We learned from executives what they thought were the reasons for not participating in training and development activities. These were executives who had not received all of the training and development they wanted or said they had received no training or development. We listed reasons the executives could select and provided space for other reasons. Before SES appointment, work experience was the reason most often cited for training and development activities being precluded or waived. After appointment, being unable to get away from the job was the reason most often cited.

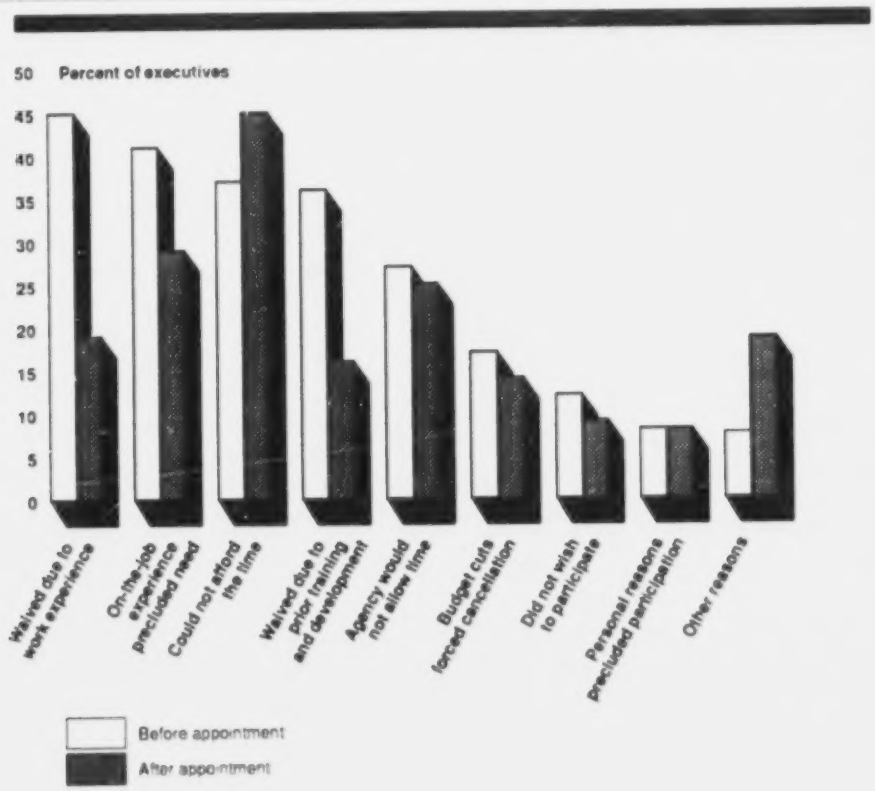
Nonetheless, executives saw training and development activities as valuable. Nearly two-thirds of all executives said both training and development were important or very important in preparing potential executives to become SES members and in helping SES members do their jobs better. The Volcker Commission's Task Force on Education and Training argues strongly for continuing education and would require regular training of all professional employees, including SES candidates

and members. Agencies are generally under no mandated obligation to provide executives or potential executives with training or development experiences, except for the lightly used CDPs.

Major Reasons Executives Gave for Lack of Training and Development

As figure 2.2 shows, certain reasons were cited much more often than others, and the reasons cited most often differed between the pre- and post-appointment periods. Before appointment, the reasons for nonparticipation centered on work and training experiences already obtained and the lack of free time. Only the latter reason stands out after appointment.

Figure 2.2: Reasons for Not Participating in Training and Development Activities



When we analyzed the data by agency size, another major reason surfaced for the post-appointment period. Executives in small agencies said

agency budget cuts forced cancellation of training development. About 33 percent of the executives from small agencies cited this reason compared to 14 and 11 percent from medium and large agencies.

In confirming our survey results, agency officials who addressed the above reasons said many SES members believe they already possess the managerial skills needed for their executive positions and do not need executive training and development. The officials generally agreed that a critical factor affecting participation in executive training and development is the time required. This, they said, often precludes attendance. Some officials said any activity longer than 2 or 3 days may adversely affect the executive's performance in his or her position. One agency we visited informed us of two recent internal surveys of SES members that identified time as the primary factor precluding needed training activities.

Specific comments from some agency officials included:

- Good performers can benefit the most from training and development; however, they have the least time available for such activities.
- Effective long-term experiences such as sabbaticals are not practical since the executive is removed from the job for extended periods.
- Those SES members in technical positions are needed on the job. They cannot afford the time to take training and development activities.

Officials from several agencies also said restricted agency budgets and a decreased emphasis on training and development by OPM and some agencies during the 1980s limited such activities during the period that our questionnaires covered. They pointed out that costs associated with some training activities, especially for executives in small agencies, are a problem during times of budget constraints. One official of a small agency said small agencies are often at a disadvantage since they experience greater budget constraints than larger agencies and do not have the advantage of being able to reprogram funds into training functions. In July 1986, we reported on the effects of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 on agency training budgets.[1] We noted a range of budget cuts across agencies, with some reporting none while others reported training budget cuts of over 70 percent.

[1] Training Budgets: Agency Budget Reductions in Response to the Balanced Budget Act (GAO/GGD-86-98BR, July 16, 1986).

No Effective Requirement for Training and Developing Senior Executives

No current law or regulation specifies the types and minimum time periods of training for senior executives. For other than an agency's CDP, OPM allows each agency to set the content and timing for executive training and development. OPM does provide limited participation requirements for CDPS.

However, most senior executives are not appointed from a CDP. We reported in 1986 and 1988 that agencies have generally not used CDPS as a source of SES appointments. Only about 21 percent of the executives we surveyed for this report who were appointed after CDP programs began were appointed from a CDP.

Recommendations of the Volcker Commission and the Training Task Force

A key proposal of the Volcker Commission is that the President and Congress must ensure that federal managers receive the added training they will need to perform effectively. The Commission also made the following recommendations on the training of federal managers:

- OPM and the Nation's schools of public affairs should work together to define the skills needed by today's executives.
- OPM should help agencies design clear career paths for advancement to SES positions and provide guidance on the kinds of development curricula and succession planning appropriate to future success.
- OPM should, with proper guidance and oversight, encourage agencies to (1) develop their own programs, (2) contract for training with other comparable government agencies, or (3) look outside government for the training needed for their specialized missions.

The Commission's Task Force on Education and Training pointed out that the government spends about 1 percent of the civilian, nonpostal payroll for training. It said Fortune 500 companies spend about 3 percent according to one estimate, and many progressive firms spend 5 to 10 percent. The Task Force continued that

> Today there are significant shortcomings in government training programs. Government agencies spend far too little on training of all kinds and concentrate their efforts too much on meeting immediate, short-term needs. The area of greatest concern is the plainly inadequate attention paid to the development of management and executive leadership in the civil service. Unlike corporations or the armed service, the federal civil service hires specialists almost exclusively. It does not seek able

Senior Executive Service: Agencies' Use of the Candidate Development Program (GAO/GGD-86-93, July 14, 1986); Senior Executive Service: Reasons the Candidate Development Program Has Not Produced More SES Appointees (GAO/GGD-88-47, Apr. 20, 1988).

people of broad background and education who are well suited to the integrative tasks of leadership and management, and it does little to prepare promising civil servants for these roles. Employees are promoted largely on the basis of their specialized training or knowledge; a decade of programs to develop candidates for the Senior Executive Service has failed to improve upon this record."

The Task Force said OPM should adopt a policy requiring regular training for all professional employees. It said that federal training policies should reflect an appropriate balance between short- and long-term needs of agencies and personnel by developing programs that, in part, provide opportunities to develop the broader knowledge and basic management skills required for positions of greater executive responsibility.

In connection with regular training, the Task Force noted that the Internal Revenue Service, which has relatively extensive training and development activities, requires all of its professional employees to receive at least 40 hours of continuing professional education each year. Also, the Comptroller General of the United States' standard for government audit employees requires 80 hours of continuing professional education every 2 years. The Task Force said that at a minimum, the latter standard could be extended to all civil service professionals.

The Senior Executive Association, an affiliation of SES members whose purpose is to promote or advocate actions that benefit federal executives, has supported a statutory provision requiring agencies to provide at least 40 hours of training for executives each year.

Chapter 3

Usefulness of Executive Training and Development

Executives generally perceived their training and development experiences as moderately useful to very useful overall in helping them carry out their SES duties. This was so for experiences both before and after appointment, however, executives from large and medium agencies thought more of their pre-appointment experiences than did executives from small agencies.

In addition to overall usefulness, we asked executives what specific benefits their experiences provided. Among the benefits, we asked if they improved their skills and abilities in the six major competency areas OPM considers essential for executive performance. They often perceived other, greater benefits from their experiences, such as broadening their perspectives on other federal and nonfederal organizations and creating opportunities to break routines and challenge themselves.

OPM requires agencies to formally assess the training needs of SES candidates and members, assign candidates advisors who are SES members, and establish Executive Resources Boards to direct and oversee executive development activities. The three together, we believe, can provide the training and development process with a level of structure and control necessary for ensuring that candidates and executives receive appropriate training. From the answers many respondents gave, which "confirming" agency officials generally supported, these controls often are not working as well as intended.

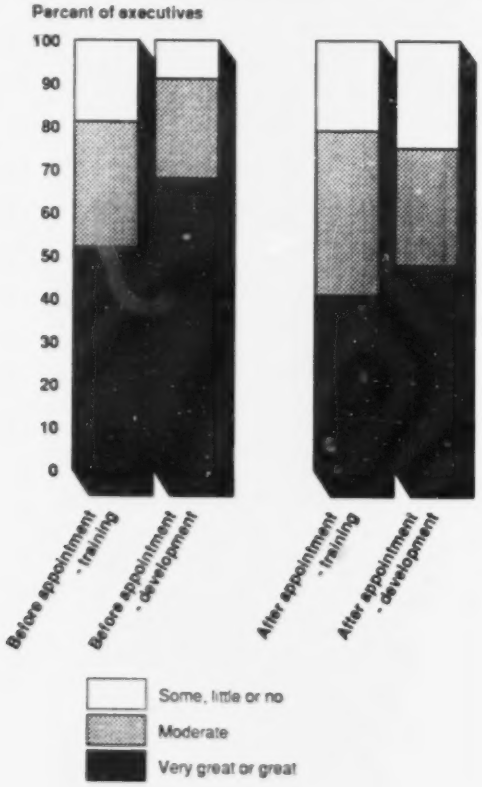
Usefulness of Executive Training and Development Varies

We asked the executives who had training or development experiences to rate those experiences in terms of how useful the experiences were overall in helping them carry out their SES duties. We gave the executives a five-point scale with which to rate their experiences: very great, great, moderate, some, and little or no extent. We analyzed the responses several ways: usefulness of experiences overall, usefulness of pre-appointment experiences between CDP and non-CDP groups, and the usefulness of OPM's sources of executive training.

Usefulness of Training and Development Experiences Overall

As figure 3.1 shows, the executives generally found their training and development experiences before and after appointment to be useful in helping them perform their executive duties. That is, 75 percent or more rated their experiences useful overall to a moderate, great, or very great extent.

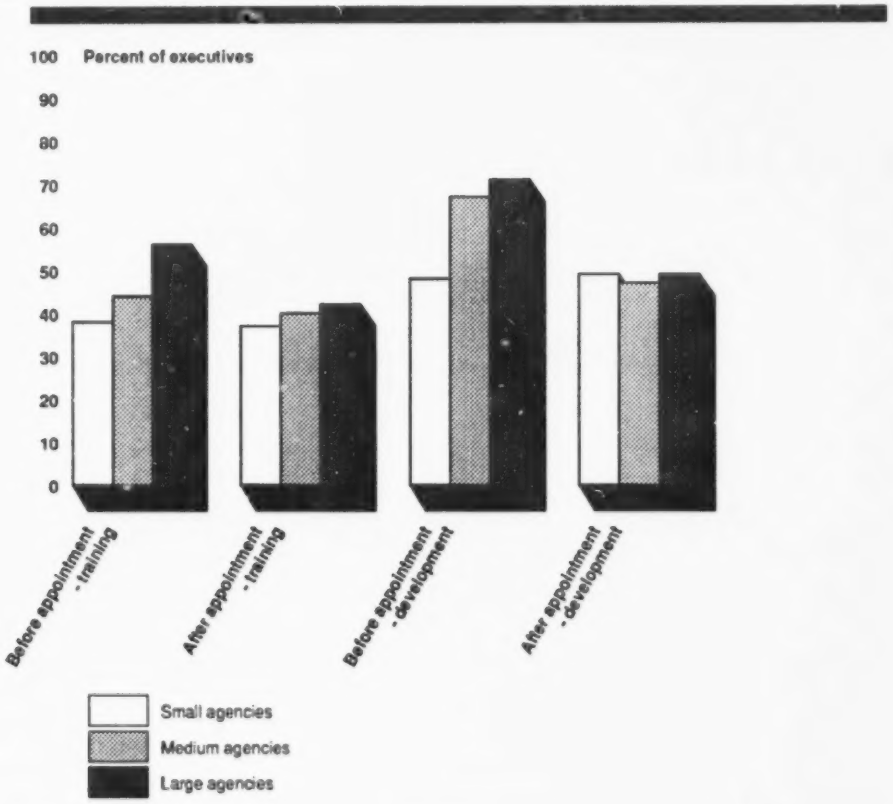
Figure 3.1: Overall Usefulness of Training and Development Before and After Appointment



As figure 3.1 shows, among the executives who felt the strongest about the usefulness of their experiences by rating them great or very great, more placed development experiences in that category than training experiences. Between pre- and post-appointment experiences, more placed pre-appointment training and development experiences in that category than post-appointment experiences.

As figure 3.2 shows, more executives from large and medium agencies usually rated their experiences as great or very great in comparison to executives from small agencies. This was especially so for pre-appointment training and development experiences.

Figure 3.2: Training and Development Before and After Appointment Useful to a Great or Very Great Extent by Size of Agency



Usefulness of CDP Training

As stated earlier, about 21 percent of the executives we surveyed who became SES members after October 1, 1981, the approximate time most agency CDPs began, were appointed from such programs; the other 79 percent were not. Individuals not appointed through a CDP sometimes attended the same training and development activities as their counterparts who were appointed from CDPs.

We analyzed the responses from the two groups to determine if they rated the usefulness of their pre-appointment experiences differently. There was little difference when considering moderate, great, and very great combined. About 88 percent of the CDP group rated their training experiences in this combined category as did 80 percent of the non-CDP group. About 90 percent of both groups considered their development experiences to be moderate, great, or very great.

There was more of a difference between the two groups among those who felt the strongest about the usefulness of their experiences. About 81 percent of the CDP group rated their training and/or development experiences as useful to a great or very great extent, while 62 percent of the non-CDP group rated in this manner. Specifically, the CDP group indicated greater participation in development experiences than those not entering through CDP and rated these experiences at a higher level than the non-CDP group.

OPM-Operated or Approved Training Sources

OPM operates several sources of executive training and has approved other sources at the university level. We asked executives who received training at these sources to rate the usefulness of the training in helping them carry out their SES duties. Only one specific source was widely attended before and after appointment,[1] OPM's Federal Executive Institute. Participants generally found the training useful, with 86 percent or more rating it useful to a moderate, great, or very great extent.

The university-based training had relatively little participation but high marks for usefulness among those who attended. For example, 5 percent of the executives received post-appointment training through Harvard University's Senior Executive Fellows Program, and 88 percent of them rated its usefulness as great or very great. Some agency officials said not many government executives attend university-based training because such training is relatively expensive and lasts longer than OPM-operated courses.

In connection with university-based training, the Volcker Commission's Task Force on Education and Training said there is a great opportunity for beneficial collaboration between government and universities, especially in the field of short- and medium-term intensive courses for executive-level officials. As a recommendation, the Task Force stated that federal agencies should modify their training policies to utilize the potential contributions of the educational community.

Views of Confirming Officials

Agency officials we spoke with to corroborate survey results generally agreed that executives believe their training and development experiences are usually useful. They supported the survey finding that the usefulness of experiences is higher before appointment. They explained

[1]All but one of the specific sources we listed on the questionnaires have been available since 1983 or earlier. The one exception has been available since 1986.

that executive training and development is usually more effective when an individual is preparing for the SES and can devote more time to mapping out training and development activities. They said the problems of time and cost are usually greater for executives in small agencies.

Mechanisms to Enhance Usefulness Not Effectively Used

OPM requires agencies to implement certain mechanisms to increase the likelihood that SES members and candidates are receiving training and development experiences and that the experiences are useful in carrying out SES duties. These mechanisms include a formal assessment process to identify training needs, individual advisors for SES candidates, and Executive Resources Boards to give "top level" direction and oversight. From what our respondents said and agency officials confirmed, these mechanisms are not working that well.

Formal Assessment Processes

OPM requires agencies to use a formal assessment process to identify the training and development needs of individual SES members and candidates. The process, which can include such formal techniques as assessment questionnaires, is to identify needs through a match of managerial competencies with past work and training experiences. OPM has published its own model of a competency based assessment process that can be used by agencies.

OPM has identified six competency areas for SES members, and it uses these competency areas in the qualification process to assess candidates for the SES. The six areas are:

- Identify and deal with key external issues that affect the executive's program area (economic, political, social).
- Represent program area to others outside the executive's unit.
- Plan, organize, and direct programs or projects.
- Obtain and administer the budgetary and/or material resources needed by the program area.
- Use human resources (work with and manage employees).
- Monitor, assess, and adjust program operations to achieve goals.

Only a relatively small percentage of the executives we surveyed were able to gauge whether the formal assessment process was beneficial in identifying training and development needs before (20 percent) or after (16 percent) SES appointment. Most could not make such a determination because they said the process was not used or they were not sure that it was used.

As table 3.1 shows, although many who rated the process rated it positively, more than one-fourth gave it low marks.

Table 3.1: Executives' Views of Formal Needs Assessment Process

	Training and development	
Extent	Before appointment (percent)	After appointment (percent)
Great or very great	23	16
Moderate	23	23
Some, little or no	28	28
Various combinations	26	33
	100	100

Executives in the "various combinations" category rated the assessment process differently between identifying training and development needs. For example, some executives rated the process high in identifying training needs but low for development needs, or moderate for one and low for the other. Except for this category, the percentages shown are of executives who rated the process the same for identifying both training and development needs.

In addition to rating the assessment process for identifying training and development needs, we asked executives to identify the specific benefits they obtained from their training and development experiences. Such benefits were aside from the overall usefulness of the experiences in helping them do their jobs. Among the possible benefits we listed were each of the six competency areas OPM recognizes for SES members and candidates. We listed other possible benefits (for example, improved your technical capabilities or helped you obtain a better SES position) that we identified from various sources, such as OPM and from SES members who tested the questionnaires. Finally, executives could add benefits not specifically listed.

We gave the executives a five point rating scale with which to express the extent of each benefit. For each benefit, we computed an average rating from all of the ratings the benefit received. Using these averages, we ranked the benefits in terms of which ones the executives saw as providing the most to the least benefit. The rankings differed between pre- and post-appointment periods and between training and development within those periods. (See app. IV for benefits and rankings.)

For the pre-appointment period, the highest ranked benefit for training activities concerned the broadening of the executive's perspective on other agencies (e.g., other federal agencies, Congress, state/local governments, private sector). For development activities, the highest ranked benefit was "Created opportunities to break routines and challenge

yourself." Of the 15 specific benefits we listed, 2 of the 6 OPM-recognized competency areas were among the top third, 3 were among the middle third, and 1 was in the bottom third. This was for both training and development.

Regarding post-appointment activities, the same three benefits were ranked in the top three for training as well as for development: broadening perspectives on other organizations, creating opportunities to break routines and challenge self, and increasing networks and access to other resources or knowledge. The order of the three differed between training and development. We listed 12 specific benefits for post-appointment activities; 1 of the OPM-recognized competency areas was ranked among the top third, 4 in the middle third, and 1 in the last third. This was for both training and development.

The OPM-recognized competency area that was ranked in the bottom third group for post-appointment activities was also ranked in the last group for pre-appointment activities. That benefit concerned the executive's "ability to obtain and administer the budgetary and/or material resources needed by your program area."

As the rankings show, the competency areas OPM recognizes as important to SES performance were usually ranked in the middle in terms of perceived benefits from training and development experiences. In other words, the executives often saw other, greater benefits coming from their training and development experiences aside from improving their skills and abilities in the six competency areas.

Agency officials we spoke with in confirming our results generally said formal assessment processes are seldom used. Instead, agencies rely more on the individual executive to identify his or her own training and development needs.

Assistance Provided by Advisors/Mentors

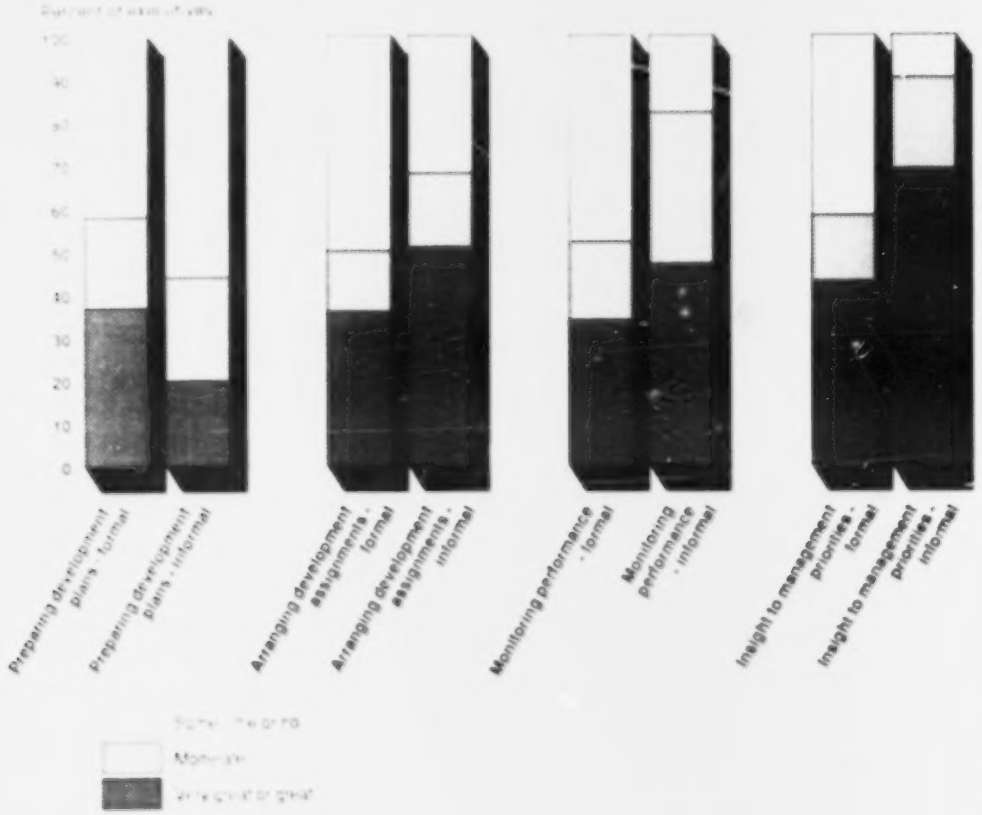
Although OPM regulations require each participant in an SES candidate development program to have an advisor or mentor who is an SES member, many of the executives we surveyed who came from candidate programs said they had no advisors/mentors or no formal ones. For those who had advisors/mentors, their responses indicate that the assistance they received could have been substantially better.

For the SES members appointed since fiscal year 1982 from a CDP, about 83 percent said they had advisors or mentors. About one-fourth of the

advisors/mentors were not formally designated as such but acted in that capacity, according to respondents. About 40 percent of the executives who became SES members since 1982 without going through a CDP said they had formal (9 percent) or informal (31 percent) advisors/mentors.

According to OPM's guidance, advisors/mentors are supposed to help candidates prepare Individual Development Plans, help arrange developmental assignments, monitor the candidate's progress, and provide perspective and insight about the organization's management. We asked executives who had advisors to rate the assistance the advisors provided in these four areas. As figure 3.3 shows, the executives often thought little of the assistance they received. Of special note is the low ratings executives gave to assistance in preparing Individual Development Plans. OPM regulations require such plans as a vital element of the development process. As the figure shows, executives with informal advisors thought more of their help than did executives with formal advisors. That is, among executives who said assistance was great or very great, a larger percentage of executives with informal advisors/mentors said so in three of the four areas.

Figure 3.3: Comparison of the Help Received From Formal and Informal Advisors



Effectiveness of Executive Resources Boards

Agencies are required by the Civil Service Reform Act to have Executive Resources Boards, and OPM requires the boards to oversee executive training and development in their respective agencies. However, executives often viewed the boards as ineffective in providing such oversight.

About 71 percent of the respondents said they had a basis to judge the effectiveness of their Executive Resources Boards. Among them, 41 percent said their boards were ineffective or very ineffective in overseeing executive training and development activities. A relatively large percentage of executives from each agency-size category so rated the boards, but small agencies had the largest percentage—52 percent. The

percentages for medium and large agencies were 47 percent and 36 percent.

Sixty-six SES members responded to our questionnaire and were current members of Executive Resources Boards. From this "insider's" perspective, 19 members saw their boards as effective or very effective in overseeing executive training and development, 15 said the boards were neither effective nor ineffective, 20 rated them ineffective or very ineffective, and 7 gave various combinations of answers. The remaining five did not rate their board's effectiveness. A neutral or an ineffective rating from 35 out of the 66 board members suggests to us that Executive Resources Boards are not functioning properly.[2]

Agency officials we talked with to confirm survey results generally said Executive Resources Boards received relatively low oversight ratings because they often do not get involved in training and development, delegating this function to lower level line managers. They said many boards do not maintain control of agency training and development activities but merely "rubber stamp" recommendations made by lower level managers.

[2]We did not project these sample results to the universe of Executive Resources Board members because the actual number of respondents (66 members) is small.

OPM Reexamining its Approach to Executive Training and Development

OPM is currently examining its role and responsibilities for executive training and development. This resulted from an internal review and recommendation that OPM take a more active leadership role in executive development. Among the areas OPM will reevaluate are curriculum development and oversight of agency development programs; it has not been actively providing such oversight.

OPM's Approach to Executive Training and Development

Following the 1978 passage of the Civil Service Reform Act, OPM provided agencies a variety of policy guidance on how to design and administer executive development programs. Its latest guidance became effective on July 18, 1984, with publication of Federal Personnel Manual Chapter 412, entitled Executive, Management, and Supervisory Development. This guidance, according to OPM, clarified and consolidated previously fragmented OPM guidance to agencies on executive and manager development. Among other things, the new chapter accomplished the following:

- It combined government policy on development of supervisors with policy on development of executives and managers and emphasized the importance of agencies establishing an integrated system for developing all three.
- It prescribed criteria for development programs. As shown in appendix III, the criteria consist of 10 general requirements that agency programs must meet.

OPM views its role as providing agencies central leadership and direction. According to Chapter 412, this leadership involves (1) setting policy and offering guidance for the development of executives, managers, and supervisors; (2) monitoring and evaluating the federal government's progress toward achieving management excellence; and (3) making OPM services and assistance available to agencies as needed. The Employee Development and Training section within OPM's Career Entry and Employee Development Group is principally responsible for providing this central leadership.

Under OPM's policy, federal agencies are expected to take the initiative to design and administer their own systematic programs for developing supervisors, managers, and executives. OPM expects the programs to conform to OPM requirements and expects agencies to use OPM services and assistance as needed. Beyond that, OPM believes "agencies should foster management excellence by establishing an environment where it is expected, developed, recognized, and rewarded."

Environment at Agencies

We found several indications that the training and development component of management does not always receive the agencies' fullest encouragement. For example, 12 percent of the executives had not participated in a single training or development activity in at least 5 years. Executives from small agencies appear to face serious difficulty in obtaining appropriate training and development experiences before SES appointment. About 6 percent of the executives wrote self-initiated comments on their questionnaires indicating a lack of support from their agencies for executive training and development. While most agency officials we spoke with in confirming survey results had mixed views about their agencies' support for executive training and development, four from different agencies believed their agencies did not emphasize such training and development.

OPM Lessened Oversight and Assistance

OPM's oversight of agency executive development efforts has been generally dormant the past 5 years due to major reorganizations and reductions in staff. Consequently, it is not in a position to know if effective, systematic development of executives is occurring. The reorganizations and lack of staff, according to OPM officials, have also lessened OPM's ability to provide agencies with guidance and assistance.

The Civil Service Reform Act directed OPM to maintain a strong oversight function over the establishment and maintenance of agency executive development programs. The law stated:

"The Office [OPM] shall assist agencies in the establishment of programs . . . and shall monitor the implementation of the programs. If the Office finds that any agency's program . . . is not in compliance with the criteria prescribed . . . [by OPM] it shall require the agency to take such corrective action as may be necessary to bring the program into compliance with the criteria."

In 1980 regulations implementing the act, OPM established a review and approval process as a mechanism for fulfilling its oversight responsibility. The regulations state that:

"The Office [OPM] shall review periodically agency executive and management development programs and approve those which meet the criteria prescribed in [5 C F R] 412.107. Whenever approved agency programs are found to fall substantially short of meeting any of the criteria, OPM approval will be withdrawn until the agency takes the necessary corrective action to bring the program into compliance."

The regulations required agencies making more than five career SES appointments to submit updates of program plans annually to OPM. The

regulations required submissions in December 1980 and at the end of fiscal years 1981, 1982, and 1983.

OPM stopped making these annual reviews in 1982 and began granting long-term approval early in 1983. However, in late 1983 OPM decided to discontinue long-term approval of agency programs, primarily because making on-site visits and reviewing the programs consumed too much time.

The regulatory requirement that OPM approve agency development programs still remains. But the requirement that agencies must submit updates of program plans has expired. As a result, OPM no longer regularly receives information on agency executive and management development programs.

With issuance of Federal Personnel Manual Chapter 412 in 1984, OPM set new procedures for monitoring and evaluating agency development programs. OPM said it would make special analyses of program trends and accomplishments using (1) available data systems, (2) results of periodic on-site agency reviews, and (3) feedback from agencies received as part of OPM's program assistance efforts. According to OPM, the results of these evaluations and special analyses would be shared with agencies and form the basis for OPM policy, leadership initiatives, and requirements that may be established to assure the development of management excellence in government.

However, OPM has not fully implemented these monitoring and evaluation procedures. No governmentwide evaluations have been completed on executive development programs since the new guidance was issued in 1984. One special analysis of agency development programs was made in fiscal year 1984 but was limited to federal installations in one OPM region. The study, which regional officials said contained significant findings, found that training services available to employees in smaller installations were inferior to those in larger organizations. OPM headquarters has not acted on the region's finding; according to a headquarters official, not enough staff have been available to determine whether the finding is true governmentwide.

The lessening emphasis OPM has given to executive training and development over recent years is indicated by the reductions in staff devoted to overseeing, evaluating, and assisting agency efforts. For example, between December 1981 and December 1988, OPM reduced from 19 to 2 the staff in executive and management development who were involved

with oversight, agency assistance, and policy development; most of the reduction occurred in 1983. An OPM official said that over the past 5 years, OPM has virtually eliminated evaluations of agency efforts and greatly reduced assistance to agencies because of significant staff reductions.

The staffing situation has been aggravated by OPM's frequent reorganizations. OPM officials said four major reorganizations involving executive training and development since passage of the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act have affected OPM's ability to fulfill its role in providing policy for, assistance to, and oversight of agency executive development efforts. For example, one official said he had to delay for almost 12 months his reexamination of policies on agency CDPs because he was unsure where his function would be placed in a planned reorganization. That reexamination, according to an OPM official, was taking place as of June 1989.

More Effective OPM Leadership Wanted

Aside from OPM, we discussed our survey results with officials of seven other federal agencies, and many of them cited the need for more effective OPM leadership in executive training and development. Some of their specific comments follow.

- OPM needs a stronger leadership role in research and development, especially in evaluating the effectiveness of training and development.
- OPM should "set the tone" for executive training and development, such as formally encouraging rotational assignments.
- Leadership is especially needed for small agency executive development efforts, where coordination of opportunities is important.
- OPM should provide feedback to agencies on various agency CDP initiatives and training and development for incumbent executives.
- Agencies need a central data bank or catalog of appropriate training opportunities for executives.

The Volcker Commission's Task Force on Education and Training said that its greatest concern was the "plainly inadequate" attention paid to the development of management and executive leadership in the federal civil service. The Task Force did not direct the statement specifically to OPM or to any other agency. In terms of direction, the Volcker Commission recommended that OPM help agencies design career paths for advancement to SES positions and provide agencies guidance on the kinds of executive development curricula appropriate to future success.

OPM Is Reassessing its Executive Development Efforts

OPM has recently instituted several initiatives concerned with executive development in the government. These have included a reassessment of its role and responsibilities in executive training and development, including its responsibilities for agency CDPs; new guidelines on executive mobility in the government; a Senior Executive Fellows Program; and the strengthening of its Federal Executive Institute. Oversight of agency executive training and development activities is an element that is to be considered in the reassessment.

The impetus for OPM's reassessment of its role and responsibilities in executive training and development began in the fall of 1986 when top management officials from various agencies met, under the sponsorship of OPM and the President's Council on Management Improvement, to discuss ways of improving the SES. In December 1987, as a follow-up to the 1986 conference, the Director of OPM established a Management Development and Training Coordination Committee to examine OPM's approach and organization for providing executive and management development services to agencies.

In May 1988, the committee recommended that OPM, in addition to delivering executive and management development programs, take a more active leadership role in ensuring that federal managers and executives are developed as effectively as possible. The committee did not specifically address OPM's oversight of agency executive training and development activities.

According to the committee chairman, the committee's objective was to examine OPM's own programs to determine how effective they are and whether they are meeting the needs of other federal agencies. Through this effort, he said, OPM is learning more about agency executive development programs, which will enable OPM to do a better job of providing overall leadership in this area.

In November 1988, the OPM Director organizationally realigned the executive training and development functions within the agency. According to the newly appointed Assistant Director for Employee Development and Training, OPM is taking a new look at its role and responsibilities for executive training and development in the federal government and how it can effectively implement the committee's recommendations. As part of this ongoing reassessment, OPM will determine what should be expected from federal executives and what types of experiences can assist them in meeting these expectations. According to the Assistant Director, OPM will assess the adequacy of the curriculum for executive

training and development and follow it with an examination of OPM's oversight role. An analysis of proper OPM staffing levels for curriculum development and oversight will be included in the examinations. According to the Director of OPM's Career Entry and Employee Development Group, to whom the Assistant Director reports, OPM will issue guidance to agencies with the expectation that agencies will examine their own needs and develop specific strategies within the framework of OPM's guidance.

Another area that will be examined is the length of stay in CDPs. In a 1986 policy options paper, OPM's training and development office, which has since been reorganized, said OPM might be wise to change its view of what constitutes "systematic development of candidates to the Senior Executive Service." The paper viewed executive development as a long-term affair rather than something to be accomplished in a relatively brief period before executive appointment. The paper noted that current CDPs provide candidates with only a "casual opportunity to get acquainted with executive functions" through various assignments as short as 3 months. It cautioned, however, that systematic development over a longer period of time throughout an individual's career would require (1) conscientious planning, (2) movement of a manager through diverse functions and organizations, and (3) careful monitoring, all of which agencies may not be willing or able to do. Extending systematic development over a longer period of time through agency CDPs may not effectively address the problem since the vast majority of executives do not enter executive ranks through such programs.

Other OPM Initiatives

OPM believes that executive mobility, a key feature in the design of the SES by the Civil Service Reform Act, has been underused. Executive mobility includes the placement of executives in other program areas or agencies to help them develop a broad perspective and provide them with a greater range of career challenges. In December 1987, OPM sent agencies a memorandum encouraging more placement of executives in mobility assignments and offered guidance on such placements. As of June 1989, OPM officials said this guidance has generated five temporary interagency placements, one temporary placement in a local government, and no permanent interagency placements.

In the spring of 1988, OPM began a Senior Executive Fellows Program through which agencies could nominate SES members for temporary assignments outside the government; for example, to state governments or corporations. For 1988, OPM had enough funds to cover up to six

placements. As a result of the 1988 initial year announcement, 6 executives were placed out of about 25 referrals. OPM indicates this program will be an annual one and has targeted funding for up to six additional placements in 1990.

OPM has also acted to strengthen the Federal Executive Institute by, in part, (1) making changes to the facility, (2) restructuring the Institute's curricula, and (3) establishing a Washington, D.C., follow-on program. The Institute, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, is one of OPM's primary sources of executive development.

Finally, OPM is planning a conference of agency Executive Resources Board Chairpersons for the fall of 1989 to identify statutory and regulatory requirements for executive development that OPM believes the boards are not meeting. In the words of one OPM official, "Our intent is to wake up the ERBs [Executive Resources Boards] to their responsibilities in executive development and to the assistance OPM can provide."

Overall Conclusions, Recommendations, and Agency Comments

Conclusions

In creating the SES, Congress envisioned a cadre of general managers providing the highest quality of executive management to the government. To help achieve this level of management, Congress saw the need for the Executive Branch to systematically develop candidates for SES membership. Congress did not stop there, however. It believed that continuing development of executives after appointment was essential as well.

SES members require managerial skills, and several reasons taken together or separately underscore the necessity of developing and honing these skills. Congress envisioned that SES members would be capable of serving in positions across the government. Most federal managerial positions are filled by people selected because of their technical qualifications in a specialized profession or career field, with such qualifications collateral to the profession of management. Finally, executives work in a complex environment where they must keep current in a variety of areas, such as new legislation and innovative management practices.

The necessity for managerial development and Congress' demand for it suggest that SES members governmentwide should be obtaining, on a continuing basis, at least some basic levels of training and development before and after appointment. The absence of such a requirement, we believe, has contributed to unevenness in executive training and development.

Most executives reported participating in some type of training and or development activity before and after SES appointment. However, about 13 percent of the executives who were appointed since 1982 said that in the 5 years before appointment, they had not received a single training or development experience to prepare them for SES membership. Nearly one-fourth of all executives had not participated in any training or development activities since appointment or October 1, 1981, whichever was later. OPM's view that training is necessary to maintain currency was unheeded by 12 percent of the executives who had not participated in formal training and development activities for at least 5 years.

According to the Volcker Commission's Task Force on Education and Training, OPM should require regular training of professional employees governmentwide to include at least 80 hours of continuing education every 2 years. Government auditing standards issued by the Comptroller General require 80 hours of continuing education every 2 years for federal auditors. Although we have not studied how many

hours of training and development over a given period executives in each agency should receive, we endorse regular training of all career professionals, including training that leads to SES membership and training for incumbent executives.

Although regular training is an important measure, other measures may be necessary as well to lessen or eliminate all of the problems and concerns that our review identified. Executives from small agencies have a much more difficult time than their counterparts from larger agencies in obtaining training and development experiences, especially in acquiring useful experiences to prepare them to become senior executives. The mechanisms to control or influence executive development—formal needs assessments, advisors, and Executive Resources Boards—are frequently ineffective, if used at all.

Executives overwhelmingly said training and development are important for preparing an individual to become a senior executive and for helping executives to better carry out their duties. Yet many said they cannot get or take the time to participate in training and development activities, or they believe that their skills have been sufficiently developed through past work and training experiences. We are not suggesting that an executive's work is secondary or that every training course that becomes available should be attended. What we are suggesting is that training and development should be a regular part of an executive's work life, both before and after he or she becomes a senior executive. Some agencies apparently do not promote that notion; about 6 percent of the executives added comments to their responses indicating that executive training and development lacked support in their agencies.

The 1978 Civil Service Reform Act gave OPM a leadership role in executive development, but it has not effectively fulfilled that role since about 1984. However, to its credit, OPM is now reviewing the executive development area to determine how it can provide more effective leadership. We believe the problems and concerns outlined above should all be part of OPM's examination. There are additional areas as well. We believe OPM's leadership role would be enhanced if it received feedback from a strong oversight function, a function that has been essentially inactive since 1984.

To the end of becoming a more active leader in executive development, we believe OPM should determine what sorts of training and development activities executives should participate in during their first years of SES membership if they lack sufficient participation in CDP-type courses. OPM

should determine if more participation in development-type activities should be part of the development program since executives found such activities very useful. OPM should determine how training and development activities can provide more benefits to candidates and members in managerial competency areas. OPM should also determine what could be done to increase attendance at university-based executive training, inasmuch as executives who have attended such training have generally found it very useful.

Finally, we believe OPM's reexamination should address the Volcker Commission's recommendations concerning (1) working with the Nation's schools of public affairs to define the skills needed by today's executives; (2) providing guidance to agencies on the kinds of executive development curricula appropriate to future success; and (3) encouraging agencies, with appropriate guidance and oversight, to develop and contract for their own mission-oriented training.

Recommendations to the Director of OPM

We recommend that OPM, in reassessing its roles and responsibilities in executive training and development, examine

- the need for governmentwide requirements for minimal levels of executive training and development,
- the difficulties small agencies face in providing executive training and development,
- the need to improve the mechanisms for ensuring that executives receive appropriate training and development,
- the need to encourage greater support among executives and agencies towards executive training and development,
- the need for certain types and levels of training for new executives, and
- ways to improve the managerial competency benefits from the training and development curriculum.

In addition, the assessment should address the previously mentioned Volcker Commission recommendations and what specific responsibilities agencies and OPM should have in the oversight process. It should address as well what actions OPM should take to ensure a strong oversight program.

Agency Comments

In written comments on a draft of this report (see app. V), the Director, OPM, said OPM generally agrees that it needs to do a major examination of training and development policies and programs for senior executives.

The Director said OPM, as a first step, will make a broad review of the policies and issues affecting the training and development of senior executives and other government employees as well. This review, the director said, will give attention to the competencies required of employees as they progress through their career ladders. The Director said OPM, in making its assessment, will not repackage old programs but will seriously look for solutions that will enable it to develop the government's workforce and prepare for the serious challenges of the future.

Scope and Methodology for Questionnaire Surveys

We mailed questionnaires to a sample of career SES members to obtain information on the extent and usefulness of their executive training and development. We used two survey instruments; one went to SES members appointed since fiscal year 1982 and the other went to members appointed before then. This appendix explains the scope and methodology behind the surveys.

We used standard statistical techniques to select a stratified random sample of the universe of 6,180 career SES members employed by the federal government on June 30, 1987. Samples were selected for those members appointed before and after October 1, 1981, and were further stratified into small (1 to 50 executives), medium (51 to 250 executives), and large (over 250 executives) agencies. Table I.1 shows the universe and sample size for each stratum.

Table I.1: Universe and Sample Size by Stratum

		Universe		Sample	
Agency size	**Total SES**	**Before FY82**	**Since FY82**	**Before FY82**	**Since FY82**
Small	592	266	326	84	90
Medium	1,742	935	807	103	104
Large	3,846	2,021	1,825	110	109
Totals	**6,180**	**3,222**	**2,958**	**297**	**303**

Because we selected a portion of the universe for receiving our questionnaires, the results obtained are subject to some uncertainty, or sampling error. The sampling error consists of two parts, confidence level and range. The confidence level indicates the degree of confidence that can be placed in the estimates derived from the sample. The range is the upper and lower limit between which the actual universe estimate may be found. We chose the specific sample sizes for each stratum so that the sampling error would not be greater than 10 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Because not all SES members in our sample responded to a questionnaire, and not all who responded answered every question, the sampling error range for some projections exceeds 10 percent (see app. II).

Questionnaire Response Rate

We mailed questionnaires to 599 SES members. Although we selected a sample of 600 executives, we could not send 1 executive a questionnaire because we were unable to obtain a correct mailing address. Not all of the questionnaires were returned. We received responses with sufficient

data for analysis purposes (usable responses) from 451 of the 599 executives, a response rate of 75 percent. Tables I.2 and I.3 summarize the questionnaire returns for the 599 questionnaires mailed and the percentages received.

Table I.2: Response Rate Statistics

Questionnaire	SES before FY82	SES since FY82	Totals
Undeliverable	0	5	**5**
Recipient deceased	1	1	**2**
Delivered but not returned	70	65	**135**
Returned but unusable because of missing data	3	3	**6**
Returned and usable	223	228	**451**
Total mailed	**297**	**302**	**599**

Table I.3: Percentage of Questionnaires Received

	SES before FY82	SES since FY82	Totals
Response rate (percent usable of total mailed)	75	75	**75**
Completion rate (usable returns as percent of total mailed less undeliverable, deceased, and unusable)	78	76	**77**

Projections of Survey Results

On the basis of the number of usable questionnaires returned, the results of our survey analyses can be projected to cover approximately 77 percent of the 6,180 career SES members employed on June 30, 1987, or 4,764 members. The portions of the universe represented in specific strata are shown in table I.4.

Table I.4: Portions of Universe Represented by Sample

Stratum	Projections based on usable responses[a]	Number in stratum universe[a]	Percent of stratum universe
Small	429	592	72
Medium	1,258	1,742	72
Large	3,077	3,846	80
Total	**4,764**	**6,180**	**77**
Before FY82	2,492	3,222	77
Since FY82	2,272	2,958	77
Total	**4,764**	**6,180**	**77**

[a]Number of executives

Sampling Errors for Projections Used in This Report

This appendix provides the sampling errors for the projections used in the body of the report. The sampling error indicates how precise our projections are, i.e., how close our projection is to the true value, the value we would have obtained if we had surveyed all SES members rather than a sample of SES members. For example, a projection of 44 percent with a sampling error of 4 percent is more precise than a projection of 44 percent with a sampling error of 17 percent, because the true value of the first projection lies between 40 and 48 percent, but the true value of the second projection lies between 27 and 61 percent.

To find a sampling error for a specific number, locate the page number; if the page is all text, the numbers appear in the same order as in the text. If a table is on the page, the numbers appear in order by row. If a figure is shown, the numbers appear from left to right. If the figure is a stacked bar, start at the left and move up the bar then move to the right to the next bar.

Page	Percent	Sampling error	Number of projected executives on which percentage is based
14	87	4	2,272
14	13	4	2,272
14	27	15	404
14	15	10	313
14	23	4	4,764
15	87	4	2,272
15	27	15	404
15	15	10	313
15	8	8	469
15	11	9	511
15	31	10	238
15	15	8	611
15	9	6	1,423
15	18	5	2,272
15	37	10	238
15	20	8	611
15	14	7	1,423
15	41	7	2,272
15	62	10	238
15	42	10	611
15	36	10	1,423

(continued)

Page	Percent	Sampling error	Number of projected executives on which percentage is based
16	77	4	4,764
16	23	4	4,764
16	13	7	1,074
16	12	3	4,764
16	"more than half"(53)	10	1,074
16	28	5	4,764
16	33	7	429
16	29	7	1,258
16	26	6	3,077
16	57	5	4,764
16	67	7	429
16	54	8	1,258
16	56	7	3,077
16	23	4	4,764
16	13	4	2,272
17	13	4	2,272
17	31	10	238
17	15	8	611
17	9	6	1,423
17	23	4	4,764
17	26	7	429
17	21	6	1,258
17	23	6	3,077
17	30	10	234
17	28	9	595
17	21	9	1,339
17	24	6	2,169
17	42	8	399
17	37	8	1,154
17	35	7	2,849
17	36	5	4,403
17	33	11	159
17	41	13	410
17	47	13	960
17	44	9	1,529
18	33	11	159
18	"nearly two-thirds"(67)	5	4,764
18	"nearly two-thirds"(62)	5	4,764
19	45	9	1,257

(continued)

Page	Percent	Sampling error	Number of projected executives on which percentage is based
19	19	5	2,665
19	41	9	1,257
19	29	6	2,665
19	37	9	1,257
19	45	7	2,665
19	36	9	1,257
19	16	5	2,665
19	27	9	1,257
19	25	6	2,665
19	17	7	1,257
19	14	4	2,665
19	12	6	1,257
19	9	4	2,665
19	8	6	1,257
19	8	4	2,665
19	8	4	1,257
19	19	5	2,665
20	33	8	284
20	14	7	783
20	11	6	1,599
21	21	6	2,221
24	52	8	1,746
24	29	8	1,746
24	19	6	1,746
24	68	9	1,348
24	23	8	1,348
24	9	6	1,348
24	41	6	3,362
24	38	6	3,362
24	21	5	3,362
24	48	8	2,034
24	27	7	2,034
24	25	7	2,034
25	38	14	136
25	45	12	439
25	56	11	1,172
25	37	9	262
25	41	9	859
25	42	8	2,240

(continued)

Page	Percent	Sampling error	Number of projected executives on which percentage is based
25	48	17	92
25	67	13	353
25	70	12	904
25	49	13	143
25	47	11	576
25	49	11	1,316
25	21	6	2,221
25	79	6	2,221
25	88	9	448
25	80	8	1,283
25	90	6	1,348
26	81	12	464
26	62	9	1,404
26	86	8	1,014
26	5	2	4,764
26	88	15	240
27	20	6	2,272
27	16	4	4,764
28	23	14	467
28	16	10	751
28	23	14	467
28	23	12	751
28	28	14	467
28	28	11	751
28	26	14	467
28	33	13	751
29	83	13	448
29	"about 1/4 of 83%"(23)	16	372
30	40	8	1,691
30	9	5	1,691
30	31	8	1,691
31	37	16	441
31	21	13	441
31	42	17	441
31	20	12	588
31	24	12	588
31	56	14	588
31	36	16	441
31	14	11	441

(continued)

Page	Percent	Sampling error	Number of projected executives on which percentage is based
31	50	17	441
31	51	14	599
31	17	10	599
31	32	13	599
31	34	16	441
31	18	13	441
31	48	17	441
31	47	14	599
31	35	13	599
31	18	11	599
31	43	16	441
31	15	12	441
31	42	17	441
31	69	13	603
31	21	12	603
31	10	9	603
31	71	5	4,764
31	41	6	3,381
31	52	8	327
32	47	9	965
32	36	8	2,090
34	12	3	4,764
40	13	4	2,272
40	"one-fourth" (23)	4	4,764
40	12	3	4,764
45	72	6	592
45	72	6	1,742
45	80	5	3,846
45	77	4	6,180
45	77	5	3,222
45	77	5	2,958
45	77	4	6,180

OPM's General Requirements for Agency Executive, Management, and Supervisory Development Programs

1. Definition of executive, manager, and supervisor positions as part of a distinct second profession with competency requirements beyond those of a specialized occupational field.

2. Agency statement of policies and strategies for achieving management excellence, to be used as primary means for communicating agency head's commitment to the "second profession" concept, and funding and staff levels to reach the goal.

3. Close coordination of development programs for executives, managers, and supervisors built on a common competency base, minimizing overlap and unnecessary costs. Executive Resources Boards will assure this through strategic management of a cohesive development system.

4. Assessment of individual and agency development needs for executives, managers, and supervisors in terms of competencies and characteristics required at each managerial level for successful implementation of policies and program initiatives.

5. Identify and meet individual development needs as a person makes critical career transition to become a new supervisor, new manager, or new executive, and establish meeting those needs as an agency priority.

6. Coverage of both initial and continuing development of executives, managers, and supervisors.

7. Identification and planning for both short- and long-term agency management development needs using projected workforce requirements and potential changes in agency mission and goals.

8. Consideration of a variety of developmental approaches and strategies, including formal training, mentoring, coaching, rotational assignments, special work projects, and long-term education and training programs, in determining the best and most economical method of fulfilling individual development needs.

9. Operation of developmental programs that ensures full integration with the agency's other personnel management programs and systems, such as recruitment, selection, compensation, performance management, affirmative employment, position management, and forecasting managerial resource needs.

10. Establishment of an evaluation system to assess both program and individual success in terms of agency-developed criteria addressing program cost, program impact on organizational and individual performance, and the extent to which other personnel subsystems are affected and strengthened.

Executives' Rankings of Benefits Obtained From Training and Development Experiences

We determined rankings by computing an average score for each benefit from all of the ratings the benefit received. We then ranked the benefits on the basis of average scores. We excluded the "other" category from our analysis and discussion on pages 28 and 29 as well as on this listing because the actual number of "other" responses was small.

	Before appointment		After appointment	
	T	D	T	D
Improved your ability to identify and deal with key external issues that affect your program area	**5**	**8**	**4**	**5**
Improved your ability to represent your program area in a variety of settings inside and outside your organization	**7**	**3**	**6**	**4**
Improved your ability to plan, organize, and direct programs or projects	**6**	**6**	**7**	**6**
Improved your ability to obtain and administer the budgetary and/ or material resources needed by your program area	**12**	**13**	**10**	**10**
Improved your ability to work with and manage employees in a fair and equitable manner	**2**	**5**	**5**	**8**
Improved your ability to monitor, assess, and adjust program operations to achieve goals	**9**	**7**	**8**	**7**
Improved your technical competencies	14	14	9	9
Broadened your perspectives on other organizations	1	4	1	3
Increased your networks and access to other resources or knowledge	4	2	3	2
Gave you the opportunity to test your potential/readiness to enter the SES	11	12	NA	NA
Created opportunities to break routines and challenge yourself	3	1	2	1
Improved your performance in your position prior to entering SES	8	9	NA	NA
Expedited your entrance into the SES	13	10	NA	NA
Met your specific needs for your initial SES duties	10	11	NA	NA
Helped you obtain a better SES position	NA	NA	12	12
Improved your ability to interact with SES political appointees	15	15	11	11

Notes
T = Training D = Development NA = Not Applicable

Competency areas recognized by OPM for SES members and candidates are in bold type.

Comments From the Director, OPM

UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20415

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

September 5, 1989

Mr. Richard L. Fogel
Assistant Comptroller General
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

I am responding to your letter of August 4, 1989, and the draft GAO report entitled, Training and Development of Senior Executives (File No. B-236244).

We are in general agreement that OPM needs to conduct a major examination of training and development policies and programs for the government's senior executives, giving particular emphasis to OPM's leadership role in this area.

We are particularly concerned about the problems cited in your report which indicate little SES participation in training and development activities, limited effectiveness of agency Executive Resources Boards, and special training problems in small agencies. I am also concerned about problems the GAO identified in an earlier study dealing with the lack of preparation for the SES, and plan for OPM to become involved in reassessing the SES candidates development program.

As a first step in dealing with the SES training problems indicated in your report, OPM will undertake an effort involving senior-level management to look at a broad array of training and development issues. Although your report deals only with SES training, our policy review will encompass a much broader look at the training and development of public service employees throughout their careers. We will give attention to the competencies required of employees as they progress through their career ladders in administrative, technical, supervisory and management positions, as well as the unique development needs of executives in the Senior Executive Service.

In making our reassessment, we will not be repackaging old programs, but seriously looking for long-term, cost-effective and innovative solutions that will enable us to develop the Government's workforce and prepare for the serious challenges of the future.

Sincerely,

Constance Berry Newman
Director

Major Contributors to This Report

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